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ABSTRACT

In an informal address, this David Jacks Professor of Higher Education offers a historical review of decision-making in American higher education. This discussion centers around these milestones: the founding of Harvard in 1636; the first alumni gift in 1648; faculty organization in 1725; annual subventions for state universities in 1805; the Dartmouth College Case in 1819, which distinguished between public and private institutions; the first self-study in 1825; the 1828 Yale Report; the 1862 Land Grant College Act; the recognition of research in 1876; the beginning of graduate school domination over undergraduate education in 1890; and the establishment of two-year colleges in 1921. It is concluded that decision-making historically has been a function of all participants, including faculty members, students, alumni, administrators, trustees, professional organizations, accreditation bodies, government, and the public. (LBH)

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CRUCIAL DECISIONS IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION *

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Even though I am not a historian by training or position, as a teacher I attempt to put things in historical perspective, and this morning I am going to talk about decision-making in American higher education historically. Walter Lippmann wrote the text of my talk on October 13, 1942, in his column, "Today and Tomorrow":

> When shall we recognize the truth of our situation? Only when we see ourselves and the events of our day as one act in a drama which began long before we were born and will not be played out until long after we are dead. We shall never manage the present, or make any sense of it, until we have explained our past well enough to imagine our future.

The practical problems of today come out of the past, and those who are unaware of history struggle with them unaware of many of their complexities. Thus to describe decision-making in American higher education, I shall mention about a dozen dates in which major decisions were made, and I'll try to answer two questions about each date: what was the decision, and who made it?

I am not going as far back in this discussion as "Genesis" and the three momentous decisions that had to be made once God had decided to create Eve. As you well remember, the third chapter identifies the serpent as the most subtle of the beasts of the field which had to decide whether to proposition Eve or Adam. It chose Eve, and then Eve had to decide whether or not she was going to accept; then Adam had to decide whether or not he'd eat the apple. These, as observed, were momentous decisions, but I begin much later with the founding the first American college.

1636: The Founding of Harvard. Two very important decisions had to be made about Harvard College. Most people don't know about the first one: that Harvard was established not by academics, not by clerics, but by laymen. Harvard arose from the decision that academics would not alone control it but that laymen would participate in its government, its decision-making. Laymen have been involved in the government of American colleges and universities ever since.

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This was not an American innovation, incidentally. The Puritans who established the Massachusetts Bay Colony were Calvinists, and one of the fundamental tenets of Calvinism is that laymen must participate in the decisions of all social institutions. In creating Harvard, the Massachusetts Puritans took its governmental pattern from Trinity College, Dublin. Trinity got it from the University of Edinburgh, which got it from the University of Leyden. Leyden got it from Calvin's Academy at Geneva, and Calvin got it from the Italian universities where lay boards of trustees were originally established in the fourteenth century.

Lay participation in the government of Harvard was a basic decision, since the creation of a lay governing board meant that in all fundamental decisions laymen would be involved. It also meant that American colleges would be institutions serving societal purposes and not the syndicalistic preserves of scholars which, like Oxford and Cambridge, would often operate in complete disregard of the public interest and be largely incapable of self-reform. And who made this basic decision? The General Court of the colony and Governor John Winthrop, a Cambridge graduate.

A second decision made in 1636 or thereabouts concerned the type of institution Harvard would be. What evolved was a uniquely American institution: the unitary four-year liberal arts college. The founders of Harvard, however, had no intention of creating a unitary college. Like the founders of William and Mary, America's second college, they intended instead that Harvard would be the first of a cluster of small residential colleges like those which make up the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. That turned out to be visionary. Sparsity of population, scarcity of learned men, and the economic conditions of the country made their hoped-for institution impossible until the twentieth century when Harvard and Yale moved in that direction. We now have seven hundred examples of the unitary liberal arts college, not because of historical plans and decisions, but because social forces favored their development. In American higher education decisions are often made not be intention but by the dice of destiny.

1648: The First Alumni Gift. This event may seem unimportant to you, but to me it is tremendously significant. In 1648 four alumni of Harvard's first class bought a piece of land near the college yard and gave it to their alma mater. It is now the site of the Widner Library. This was the beginning of alumni giving which last year totaled over one hundred million dollars and which permits American colleges to make decisions to do things that would otherwise be beyond their grasp.

1725: Faculty Organization. In this year Harvard's small faculty began to keep and preserve its minutes. It is an important date in the controversy about who should control colleges and universities -- professors, the faculty as a group, presidents, or trustees. The general impression seems to be that presidents and trustees have been monstrous tyrants and that

professors have had to fight them for their rights. Admittedly this sometimes has been true. Eliphalet Nott, the president of Union College for sixty-two years and record-holder for American college presidents, was asked late in his career about faculty meetings at Union. "We had a faculty meeting fifty years or so ago," he said. "But I hope we never have another."

This attitude may still prevail in some retarded institutions, but it has not been true of our educational institutions in general. Harvard has had an organized faculty since at least 1725; the Yale faculty has participated in promotion and advancement decisions since at least 1839; Cornell opened with an organized faculty in 1868, as did Stanford in 1891; and all institutions of any real stature in this country have similarly long histories of organized faculty participation in institutional decisions.

1805: Annual Subventions for State Universities. Both Pennsylvania and North Carolina provided in their constitutions for the establishment of state universities, and we generally consider that the University of North Carolina and the University of Georgia, which opened first, are our earliest state universities. But in my book a university can't properly be called a state university until it has continuing support from the state, and this began with the creation of South Carolina College in 1805. It may seem strange that a southern state should have begun state subventions, but before the Civil War the southern states ardently supported higher education. Until then they alone provided annual support for their state universities, for although the northern states were providing land endowments for buildings, none made annual grants until Michigan began them in 1867.

Who made the decision that the University of South Carolina should have an annual subvention? John Drayton, the governor of the state. Drayton, like his fellow Jeffersonians, believed that the state should participate in the support and control of education from the common schools through the universities, and his address advocating the annual grants is one of the most decisive documents in American higher educational history.

1819: The Dartmouth College Case. In six states, the Jeffersonians sought more than public support of higher education: they fought for complete state domination of it. For example, they closed the private University of Pennsylvania and established a new state university in Philadelphia. They closed King's College in New York City, which later reopened as Columbia College, and they made similar efforts at Harvard and at Yale. In 1816 they attempted to take over Dartmouth and to convert it into a state university. The Dartmouth trustees divided on the issue, and this led to legal battles which ended in the United States Supreme Court.

Daniel Webster, a Dartmouth alumnus, represented the loyal college trustees before the Court and argued that the New Hampshire legislature could not abrogate the charter granted by George III. In his plea he held that a charter is a contract, and the Court upheld this point of view.

Incidentally, three Supreme Court justices wrote opinions favoring Dartmouth -- Joseph Story, Bushrod Washington (the nephew of George Washington), and John Marshall, whose decision is the one usually quoted -- but each favored Dartmouth on different grounds.

The Jeffersonians' defeat in the Dartmouth College Case ended their efforts to control higher education and resulted in the American distinction between public and private colleges. Until the decision this distinction was not clearly made. Harvard, Williams, and Bowdoin, for example, were all receiving subventions from Massachusetts, but the Dartmouth decision forced them to choose between state and private support. Thus since 1824, when its ten-year state grant came to an end, Harvard has received no funds from Massachusetts. Somewhat later, when Harvard was in financial trouble, its then president Edward Everett suggested that it seek legislative support; but happily for Harvard and, I think, for the rest of the country, Massachusetts turned Harvard down.

In addition to making this distinction between public and private institutions, the Dartmouth decision stimulated both state legislatures and religious denominations to organize new colleges, particularly in the new middle-western states. The competition and diversity which resulted in American higher education has proved one of its greatest strengths.

1815: The Trek to Germany. Three American students made an important decision in 1815. They decided that since no opportunity for advanced study existed in this country they had to go to Germany. Over ten thousand American students followed them during the next ninety-nine years. They brought back not only their Ph.D.s, but also German concepts of university education. (The first American to earn a Ph.D., incidentally, was a scoundrel. He was Nathaniel Eaton, the first head of Harvard, who was dismissed after twenty-two months for being corrupt in almost every way you can imagine, and who then left the colonies to take his degree at Padua.)

One of the trio was Edward Everett, whom I mentioned above. He later served as congressman and governor of Massachusetts, president of Harvard, and secretary of state under Fillmore, and is best remembered as the man who gave the two-hour oration before Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The second was Edward Cogswell, who introduced progressive education to America in his school in Northampton, Massachusetts. The third was George Ticknor, by all odds the most important. He came back to teach the modern languages at Harvard, but he found that in comparison with the German universities, Harvard was no more than a high school. He therefore petitioned Harvard's governing boards to reform the curriculum.

He had no success until a new group entered the decision-making scene: the students. True, students had controlled the universities of medieval Italy, but in northern Europe and in America they had influenced policy decisions only indirectly. Harvard's class of 1823, however, were such hell-raisers that a third of them, including the son of John Quincy Adams, then secretary of state, were dismissed outright in their senior year. Despite Adams' appeals from Washington, the Harvard governing boards refused to

reinstate the seniors. Faced with continuing student unrest as well as Ticknor's proposals for reform, they decided on a self-study.

1825: The First Self-Study. Many college self-studies have been recently undertaken, but in my judgment the original self-study initiated by Harvard's governing boards must be called the most successful, because it accomplished the most effective reformation ever made of an American college. The Harvard Corporation, the Board of Overseers, and the faculty all appointed committees which met for two years. They redefined the functions of the president, they established instructional departments, they instituted a primitive elective system, they sectioned classes in the modern languages on the basis of ability, they revised the college statutes, and they abandoned money fines for student misdemeanors. And who made the decision? The governing boards, stimulated by Professor Ticknor's petitions and precipitated by student unrest.

1828: The Yale Report. Two years after the Harvard self-study, Yale's governing board made a decision which had far-reaching effects. Reforms were altering not only Harvard. Amherst had opened in 1823, and its faculty soon thereafter had proposed that technological subjects and teacher training should be included in the liberal arts curriculum; the University of Virginia had opened in 1825 offering the experimental sciences; in the wilderness of western Massachusetts Williams had added the modern languages; and in Schenectady, Union College was preparing to introduce the quite unrespectable subject of engineering.

All these developments stimulated the Yale Corporation to petition the president and the faculty to report to them whether and how Yale should change. Notice the initiative here: the governing board decided to ask the faculty to look at what it was doing. In 1828 the Yale faculty made its report, the most reactionary document ever written in American higher education. Only three subjects were worthy of study in a liberal arts college, claimed President Day, who taught mathematics, and Professor Kingsley, who taught classics. The three? Mathematics, Greek, and Latin. The function of the college was to turn out intellectually disciplined minds; and only these studies, they insisted, gave intellectual discipline.

This attitude that the liberal arts college should stay pure and undefiled by the modern world around it influenced not merely Yale but the curriculums of most American colleges into the twentieth century. One reason lay in the fact that more college presidents during the nineteenth century had graduated from Yale than from any other institution, and they took with them the rationale of the 1828 report. Five Yale alumni, for example, had preceded me as president of Hamilton College, and in my judgment Hamilton has never recovered from them.

Yale is a great institution, but it had to await the collapse of the doctrine of intellectual discipline before it could advance very far beyond

its faculty report of 1828. The country at large, however, could not wait for reform. It was outgrowing the old classical college, and two memorable decisions were necessary to create the institutions it needed.

1862: The Land Grant College Act. The decision behind this legislation ranks, in my opinion, as the most important ever made in American higher education -- and all because of seven words. The Act established state institutions supported by endowments of land from the federal government, and it provided that the new institutions must teach agriculture and the mechanical arts or engineering. Most important, however, it required that these subjects be taught -- and here are the seven words -- "without excluding other scientific and classical studies." May I repeat those words: "without excluding other scientific and classical studies." Their inclusion produced the most influential institution in American higher education -- the comprehensive university.

By "comprehensive university" I mean an institution which combines the historic academic disciplines with the modern subjects and with professional or occupational education. Remember that the European university had four faculties -- law, medicine, divinity, and the arts or philosophy. It had no place for experimental science and no place for professional education in engineering, agriculture, or commerce. Yet the idea of the comprehensive university came from Europe. Leibniz proposed it at the end of the seventeenth century in advocating the establishment of a fifth faculty which would teach economics, engineering, technology, and agriculture. In 1776 Denis Diderot, the great French encyclopedist, also proposed a comprehensive university when Catherine the Great asked him to design a new university for St. Petersburg.

In America, Benjamin Franklin at the University of Pennsylvania and Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia made attempts to create comprehensive institutions, and a number of colleges began to establish parallel curriculums and to adopt the elective principle in order to expand their offerings. But the Land Grant College Act securely established American higher education on the comprehensive pattern.

Who wrote the decisive seven words? You may say, of course, that the author of the Act Justin Smith Morrill, wrote them. I don't think so. There is nothing in his background to suggest that he knew that much about educational thinking. Yet I don't know who made this decision, and so I propose that someone should be given a small research grant to find out who did. In any case whoever wrote those words made more American higher educational history than any other person I know of.

You may not like the modern comprehensive university. Many people don't. Thorsten Veblen didn't; Abraham Flexner didn't; Mr. Hutchins doesn't. But like it or not, because of the Land Grant College Act the comprehensive university is today the most characteristic and the most powerful institution in American higher education.

1876: The Recognition of Research. Twelve years after the passing of the Land Grant College Act and one hundred years after the founding of the nation the first American institution opened worthy of the name of university. What do I mean by worthy of the name? Well, in the judgment of most people an institution cannot properly be called a university unless it undertakes research, and no American institution honored the function of research until Johns Hopkins opened in 1876.

A few professors had done research previously, but they did it on their own time. America's first professor who gave any time to research was Isaac Greenwood, who taught at Harvard during the middle of the eighteenth century, but he had been idsmissed for drunkenness and, being a bachelor, for coming back from Europe with three pairs of silk stockings. As late even as 1909 Edwin E. Slosson could report after visiting the University of Minnesota that "the regents generally regarded research as a private fad of a professor, like collecting etchings or playing the piano."

We don't know who decided on the seven words in the Land Grant College Act, but we do know who decided to make research a basic function of American universities. His name was Daniel Colt Gilman, in my book the greatest American college or university educator of the nineteenth century. He alone saw that the country needed a research-oriented university. Eliot didn't see it at Harvard. White didn't see it at Cornell. Angell didn't see it at Michigan. They all, however, recognized Gilman's brilliance, and they all recommended that he be made president of the new Johns Hopkins University.

Gilman had been considered for the presidency of Yale, but the Yale Corporation had elected instead a broken-down clergyman, Noah Porter, who looked resolutely to the past and denounced his reform-minded colleagues as quacks and charlatans. Johns Hopkins' Board of Trustees were more farsighted: they brought Gilman to Baltimore to learn about his ideas, elected him president, and accepted his proposal that a research university be established under their government and his leadership.

1890: The Graduate School Begins to Dominate Undergraduate Education. Gilman foresaw that if graduate education and research were added to the existing American liberal arts college, general education would be overwhelmed. Hence he proposed that Johns Hopkins be entirely a graduate school with no undergraduate college. His board of trustees rejected this proposal, however, and Johns Hopkins opened with a three-year undergraduate curriculum.

Had Gilman succeeded in this plan, general education today might not be crippled by graduate education and research as it is at most American universities. We would have the teachers responsible for general education administratively separate from the teachers concerned with graduate education and research. In a history-making reorganization of Harvard in 1890, however, President Eliot and his associates made the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences responsible for all nonprofessional education from the beginning of the freshman year through the Ph.D. degree. This put undergraduate education at Harvard under the control of professors interested primarily

in research, and general education in American universities had been shackled ever since. The other eastern colleges which were also remodeling themselves into universities all followed Harvard's leadership and the state universities followed the example of the older eastern institutions. Being new and with no funds to speak of, they couldn't go to their legislatures and plead for two separate faculties, one for general education and one for advanced education and research. Consequently the research point of view has come to dominate undergraduate education and has created the most serious conflict in American higher education.

No other weakness of our colleges and universities seems to me so flagrant as their failure in general education. They push it into neglected corners by leaving it to junior members of the faculty and to graduate assistants, and they undermine it by delaying or denying promotions to its teachers. Thus despite the concern about general education that gave such promise just after the Second World War, our undergraduate colleges are rapidly becoming prep schools for the professional schools and the graduate schools.

1921: The Two-Year College Comes of Age. To avoid the conflict of general education with graduate education and research, Gilman wanted to create a separate graduate university. Other university presidents tried to bisect the existing four-year college and turn over its first two years to the secondary school and add the upper two years to the graduate school.

Henry Philip Tappan, the first president of the University of Michigan, proposed this plan in 1852. Enamored of the German system of education, he held that American education should be reorganized into a system having an eight or ten-year elementary school, a six-year high school, and a university beginning at the present junior year. In the 1870's William W. Folwell actually got the University of Minnesota to operate under this plan for five or six years, and in the 1890's William Rainey Harper at Chicago supported the plan and established several six-year high schools. For want of a better term, he called their top two years "junior colleges." Finally, Robert Maynard Hutchins unsuccessfully resurrected Harper's plan at Chicago in 1942 and awarded what came to be called the "bastard of arts" degree at the end of the historic sophomore year.

There are still people who believe that we should bisect the four-year college. I do too, logically. The four-year college is a very illogical institution, but I have long pointed out to my students that we don't make social policy in terms of logic, we make it in terms of history. Logic can't dispose of vested interests, and in this case the vested interests were the existing liberal arts colleges which quite naturally refused to accept an invitation to commit suicide.

As a result, in the interplay of forces between the proponents of the six-year high school and the defenders of the liberal arts college, there emerged the two-year junior college. By 1921 the American Association of Junior Colleges came into being. The two-year college had achieved recognition and was here to stay. But its emergence was a historical accident.

I do not mean this invidiously. I simply mean that nobody intended the two-year college. Instead, the proponents of what developed into the junior college originally planned to create the six-year high school.

You are probably familiar with the other significant dates of this century. In general education, for example, the decisions at Amherst in 1914, Columbia in 1919, Chicago in 1931, and Harvard in 1945. In federal support, the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1945 and the National Science Foundation in 1952. So let me move on now very briefly to a discussion of how we make decisions in higher education.

The general notion is that tyrannical presidents force decisions on their institutions. But look at the major decisions I have listed. Of the thirteen, only two -- Gilman's in 1876 and Eliot's in 1890 -- were initiated by presidents. Trustees initiated the Harvard self-study of 1825 and the Yale Report of 1828; students made the 1648 and 1815 decisions; and faculty members undertook Harvard's 1725 reorganization and, with student help, precipitated the 1825 reforms. In contrast, at least four of the decisions were made outside these groups: by the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636, the governor of South Carolina in 1805, the Supreme Court in 1819, and Congress in 1862. And two decisions were actually historical accidents -- the creation of America's unitary liberal arts colleges and its two-year junior colleges.

Thus not only faculty members, students, alumni, administrators, and trustees participate in institutional decisions, but so do professional organizations, accreditation bodies, governmental agencies, and the American public at large.

I believe we are more and more coming to recognize that the way to make decisions in higher education is through participation of all interested groups, not only those inside our colleges and universities, but many outside. No group, in my opinion, should monopolize the decisions of social institutions. The history of academic government seems to be clearly against monopoly by either the general public or by professors, by students or by alumni, by administrators or by trustees. It demonstrates that the most successful system involves all interest groups -- the general public, the faculty, the administrators, the alumni, the students. This system of academic government prevents monopoly, and since the essence of democracy is the power of participation in decision-making, it represents democracy in action.

I am a little worried about the AAUP, however, because it seems to have recently taken a new position on academic government. When Joseph A. Leighton, professor of philosophy at Ohio State, and the other members of the AAUP's Committee T established the Association's principles for academic government in 1920 they clearly declared that governing boards should be the partners of faculty members in making policy. But a year ago in his AAUP presidential address Dean Fuchs of Indiana University took the position that primacy in decision-making belongs with the faculty.

I disagree and believe that the participation of lay trustees is essential to the effective operation of American higher education. The skills, the knowledge, the wisdom necessary to make decisions in higher education today require, I strongly believe, the intelligent cooperation of all interested parties.

I haven't yet mentioned computers. Some people seem to believe that these machines can and will be the pre-eminent decision-makers of the future. I recall, however, a doggerel poem that was surreptitiously distributed during my New England prep school days when the typewriter hadn't been around very long, the automobile wasn't very old, and the airplane had just been invented. A verse was devoted to each of these great inventions, and each one ended with the line, "But thank God we're making babies in the good old-fashioned way."

Regardless of computers, we are going to continue to make decisions in the good old-fashioned way, and I hope that your own decision-making will be helped by this review of the decision-making process and of some of the great historical decisions which have shaped American higher education.

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